

Signs of Hypocrisy

وَإِذَا رَأَيْتَهُمْ تُعْجِبُكَ أَجْسَامُهُمْ وَإِنْ يَقُولُوا تَسْمَعُ لِقَوْلِهِمْ كَأَنَّهُمْ خَشْبٌ مُّسْنَدَةٌ يَحْسِبُونَ كُلَّ صَيْحَةٍ عَلَيْهِمْ هُمُ الْعَدُوُّ فَاحْذَرَهُمْ قَاتَلَهُمُ اللَّهُ أَنَّى يُؤْفَكُونَ

“When you look at them, their exteriors please you. When they speak, you listen to their words. They are as (worthless as hollow) pieces of timber propped up, (unable to stand on their own). They think that every cry is against them. They are the enemies; so beware of them. The curse of Allah be on them! How deluded they are (from the truth)!”¹

The goal of this verse is to make clear the signs of hypocrisy. One can differentiate a hypocrite from a believer by looking for these signs. These signs are, to a certain degree, general and are present in hypocrites of this day and age. We will now explain these characteristics.

They Have The Ability To Hide Their True Face

Commentators of the Qur’an say: “The hypocrites were handsome men during the time of revelation. ‘Abd Allah bin Ubay was at the head of the hypocrites and his followers were all tall and handsome. They used their good looks for profit.”² Because of the historical circumstances surrounding this verse, we cannot take the appealing appearance of the hypocrites as a general principle.

Perhaps the meaning of the sentence: “When you look at them, their exteriors please you,” is that the hypocrites hide their true face in front of the believers. The way that they conduct themselves, with peace and tranquility, would please anyone. Believers think them to be righteous individuals.

This possibility might be closer to the actual meaning of the verse than what other commentators have mentioned. According to this interpretation a general or at least prevailing principle is formed. Hypocrites hide their faces to cover up their hypocrisy and find a place amongst the believers while, in reality, they are predators and hold a deep-rooted animosity. Of course, this peace and tranquility does not prevent them from speaking their minds at necessary times.

They Are Both Outspoken And Eloquent Speakers

This point is clear. The hypocrite does not believe what he is pretending to be. Sometimes he thinks that others can understand that he is a hypocrite, so he tries to cover this feeling of theirs by being generous in speech.

The hypocrite tries to gain trust by paying attention to the believer. In the early Islamic period, they were so eloquent in their speech that sometimes it seemed as if they attracted the Prophet's (S) attention as the verse says: "When they speak, you listen to their words."

We must not be tricked by a group's generous speech. At the very least we should consider the possibility that one is speaking this way to trick us, not because they care for us.

They Are As Worthless As Hollow Pieces Of Timber Propped Up

Hypocrites, at the time of revelation, would enter the mosque and sit leaning against the walls at the end of the hall. They did not gain the least out of divine revelation or the Prophet's (S) words. They did not understand reality. They were like spiritless bodies or dry sticks that did not show the smallest reaction towards the Prophet's (S) wise and logical speeches. Let the reader think: was there a soul in their bodies?

Occasionally it is understood from depicting them as pieces of timber leaning against a wall that they have a useless existence. Wood is useful when used for work or holding up a building. If it is not being used, it is not profitable. This explanation is a little too far from the apparent and common (*'urfi*) meaning of the verse.

There is also a third possibility which might be more correct than the first two. It is possible to say that the reason they are depicted as timber leaning on walls is that they are like dry wood in front of natural disasters. They do not show the smallest amount of compassion. The Arabic word '*khashab*' means dry wood devoid of softness or, metaphorically, compassion.

Showing the correct amount of sympathy in the face of events is a sign of belief. Examples of not showing correct sympathy are using flattery, opportunism or going back and forth in a decision.

Opportunistic people do not have a clear aim in life. They do not keep to any principle in life. They throw all of their principles aside when various circumstances appear in their life. Compassionate people will make peace with the public and even with their enemies if their principles or goals are not in danger. They would rather hold to their principles than make a little extra profit.

Nature teaches us that a tornado does not discriminate between young and old trees, flowers, plants or farmlands. Fields of grain and gardens full of plants and flowers do not show resistance against the tornado. They bend down while the tornado passes by. Then, after one minute, these plants return to

their normal state. In contrast to this, dry trees lack such flexibility and try to resist the tornado, but are destroyed after only a few minutes.

The Prophet of Islam (S) explained this social reality in one of his speeches: “A believer is like a spike of wheat. When strong wind hits him sometimes he stands up and sometimes he sits down. Disbelievers, who do not bend down with compassion and who do not make peace with people, are like sturdy trees that are destroyed by a strong wind.”³

Because of their lack of a good mind and intellect, hypocrites did not listen to these words of the Prophet, even though it would have brought them profit, They were never willing to analyze Islamic principles and laws because their hearts were blind. They were never willing to act on principles that were only to their advantage.

Hypocrites' actions and words are illogical because of the disease of hypocrisy which is inside of them. An example of such illogical thinking occurred when the Messenger of Allah (S) and the believers in his religion made peace with Islam's obstinate enemies in the land of *Hudaybiyah* and a group of near-sighted people because angry.

We will now relate an example of humanity's greatest sympathizer, the Prophet of Islam (S) and his actions at the war of *Hudaybiyah*. It will become clear that the exalted leader of Islam (S) displayed the highest level of compassion since his principles were not in danger:

The Muslims were confronted with strong resistance from the polytheistic army of Mecca in the days of *Hudaybiyah*. The days of *Hudaybiyah* were when the Muslims stopped in a place called *Hudaybiyah* in order to make the lesser pilgrimage (*‘ummrah*).

An intense war was about to begin between the two parties. Various representatives of the *Quraysh* came to the Prophet (S) to discuss the situation. None of them was able to solve the situation diplomatically. Finally Suhayl bin ‘Umar was sent to end this situation by making a peace treaty. The Prophet saw Suhayl and said: “Suhayl has come to make a peace treaty between us and the *Quraysh*.” Suhayl came and sat down. He spoke as a diplomat and sparked the generosity of the Prophet to perform a few actions.

Suhayl said: “Oh Abu al-Qasim! Mecca is our holy ground and a place of honor for us. The Arab world knows that you have fought against us. If you enter Mecca with force and with your great strength, you would make our weakness and helplessness known to the whole Arab world. Tomorrow all of the Arabs will be mocking our land. I swear by the pleasant thoughts that you have towards us, by the respect for Mecca and by your birthplace...”

The Prophet of Islam (S) then interrupted Suhayl and asked: “What are you getting at?”

Suhayl said: “The leaders of the *Quraysh* want all of you to go back to Medina this year and leave your

obligatory pilgrimage for next year. Next year, the Muslims will be able to participate in all of the pilgrimage ceremonies like every other Arab tribe, with the two conditions that they do not stay in Mecca for more than three days and that they cannot have a weapon other than the traveler's sword.”

Suhayl's conversation with the Prophet (S) resulted in a comprehensive peace treaty between the Muslims and the *Quraysh*. Suhayl was extremely demanding in the specifics and the conditions of the peace treaty. Sometimes the peace treaty was close to being ripped up before it was signed, but because both sides wanted peace they would start over.

The peace treaty, despite Suhayl's inflexibility, was written. It was decided that the peace treaty should be written on two pieces of paper and both documents signed by both parties.

According to most historians, the Prophet (S) ordered 'Ali (a) to write the peace treaty in the following manner:

The Prophet (S) ordered the Commander of the Faithful to write: 'In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful.' 'Ali (a) wrote it, and Suhayl said: “I am not familiar with this sentence, Do not write the Compassionate, the Merciful. Instead, you should write: 'In your name, Oh God.'”

The Prophet of Islam (S) accepted and 'Ali (a) wrote it the way Suhayl wanted. The Prophet (S) then ordered him to write, 'This peace treaty was written by Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah.' Suhayl objected and said: “Your prophethood is not part of our customs. If we accepted your prophethood we would have never come to fight against you. You must write it in your and your father's name alone. The phrase 'the Messenger of Allah' must be erased.”

Some of the Muslims did not agree with the Prophet (S) in surrendering this much to Suhayl's wishes. But the Prophet (S) was thinking about the enormous consequences of this peace treaty and accepted Suhayl's objection. He ordered 'Ali (a) to erase the phrase 'the Messenger of Allah.'

Here, 'Ali (a) said with the utmost respect: “I do not have the ability to erase prophethood from your holy name.”

Then the Prophet (S) told 'Ali (a) to place his finger over the words 'the Messenger of Allah' and he would erase them himself. 'Ali (a) did this and the prophet erased the phrase.⁴

The flexibility that the honorable leader of Islam (S) showed, while writing the peace treaty, was unprecedented in the world. This is because he was not engrossed by materialism or his own personal feelings. He knew that the truth would not be changed by writing or erasing a word. He agreed with everything that his opponent proposed in order to protect the peace treaty.

[History Repeats Itself](#)

The first student of the Prophet of Islam (a) faced this very hardship. The Prophet's second breath, 'Ali (a) was like a photocopy of the Prophet. In many instances, he was faced with situations similar to those

the Prophet faced and he acted as the Prophet would have. When 'Ali (a) refused to erase the words 'the Messenger of Allah' the Prophet (S) turned towards him. The Prophet (S) knew that 'Ali (a) would face a situation similar to his own, so he said: "The children of these people will invite you to do this and you, being totally oppressed, will do it."⁵

These words were in 'Ali's (a) mind until the war of *Siffin* presented itself. The Commander of the Faithful's gullible army was tricked by Syria's army. Syria's army was led by Mu'awiyah and 'Amr 'As. 'Ali's (a) own army forced him to agree on a peace treaty. A group was formed to compose the peace treaty.

'Ubayd Allah bin Abi Rafi', the Commander of the Faithful's secretary, was ordered by 'Ali (a) to write: "This is what the Commander of the Faithful, 'Ali, decrees..."

At that moment, 'Amr 'As, representing Mu'awiyah and the Syrian army, turned towards 'Ali's (a) secretary and said: "Write 'Ali's name and his father's. If we officially accepted him as the Commander of the Faithful we would have never entered into war against him." The speech was long, and the Commander of the Faithful did not want to give his gullible soldiers an excuse. The peace treaty was debated for over a day when 'Ali (a) gave the permission to erase the phrase 'the Commander of the Faithful' because of his own officer's insistence.

'Ali (a) then said: "God is the greatest, custom to custom (*sunnah bi-sunnah*)." He then related the story of *Hudaybiyah* and what the Prophet (S) had said to the people.⁶

The Text of The Peace Treaty of Hudaybiyah

The *Quraysh* and the Muslims both agree not to fight each other for ten years, so that there will be general peace and safety in the Arab Peninsula.

Muhammad must send back any person of the *Quraysh* if he leaves Mecca, becomes Muslim, and joins up with the Muslims without the permission of his elders. But it is not necessary for the *Quraysh* to send back a Muslim who comes to them.

The Muslims and the *Quraysh* can make agreements and pacts with any other tribe.

This year, Muhammad and his followers must return back to Medina from this place. In the years to come they can come freely to Mecca and visit the house of God, with the conditions that they do not stay for more than three days in Mecca and that they do not carry any weapon with them except for the traveler's sword.⁷

Muslims who live in Mecca can perform their religious ceremonies freely. The *Quraysh* do not have the right to bother them or make them return to their previous religion. The *Quraysh* also do not have the right to ridicule their religion.⁸

The two signature parties agree that each other's property must be respected. All deceptions should be stopped. The hatred that they have for each other must be erased from their hearts. When a Muslim enters Mecca, his money and possessions should be respected.[9](#)

This is the text of the peace treaty of Hudaibiyah. It has been collected from different sources, and some of these sources have been mentioned in the footnotes. This peace treaty was written on two pieces of paper and approved by a group of both the leaders of the Quraysh and the Islamic community. One of the documents was given to Suhayl and the other to the Honorable Prophet (S).[10](#)

This peace treaty and others like it that were written in the lifetime of the Prophet and other leaders of Islam reveal the flexibility that they displayed before their enemies. This also allows us to show flexibility when our principles and goals are not in danger. In doing this, our opponent will be attracted to our sympathy and trustworthiness.

Islam shows us, with these historical treaties, that wars or any other trials in life are goals in and of themselves; they should not be seen as means to a separate goal.

They Are Frightened by Any Calamity

Hypocrites commit all kinds of atrocities behind the mask of their good appearance. They hide their actions behind an urbane façade. But they always fear that the curtain will be lifted and that their crimes will manifest themselves. A huge cloud of fear has engrossed their hearts.

Because of this, they are scared of anything that might remove the smoke screen they have put up. Sometimes they become frightened by a simple letter or by someone asking them to explain a small point. Whenever they are confronted with the smallest change in society, even if it is due to an unforeseen event, or whenever they examine the society, they think that everyone has found out their secret. They imagine that they are going to be arrested and punished.

The reason for this is that optimism, dignity, bravery and firmness come from those people of society who have pure hearts and stay away from sin and hypocrisy. Fear, anxiety and agitation are the direct results of sin and hypocrisy. The Arab proverb: "A treacherous person is always scared," expresses this point.

The Qur'an mentions that fear and agitation dominate the hearts of hypocrites. They are scared of any commotion, change or sound which they think is to their detriment. This is seen in the verse under explanation, "They think that every cry is against them."

They Are Enemies in A League of Their Own

The holy religion of Islam claims to be the last heavenly religion brought down by the Seal of the Prophets (S). It states clearly that the reign of other religions has come to an end. Only one religion,

Islam, will rule over the people.

It goes unsaid that this statement that 'the reign of other religions ahs come to an end,' created many different kinds of enemies. The followers of the Church, for example considered themselves enemies of Islam. With all of these great enemies, the Qur'an still only alludes to one enemy, and proclaims that this enemy is the real enemy of the Muslim people. Other enemies are not given importance. It is believed that the Muslims have only one enemy: the hypocrites. This has been clearly mentioned by the verse: "They are the enemies; so beware of them."

The question might be asked: "How do you say that the hypocrites are the only enemies of Islam when the enmity of the Christians and Jews was and still is manifest?" The answer to this question becomes clear with the explanation of the previous verses.

The hostility that other groups had for Islam was obvious; it was written on their foreheads. But the damage caused by the hypocrites, who pretended to be friends and showed not the smallest sign of ill will, was greater than any other group. For this reason it is not an exaggeration to say that the hypocrites are enemies in a league of their own. Turn the pages of history with precision, examine the damage caused by those who pretended to be Muslim, and be the judge of this claim yourself.

During the age of the *khulufa*[11](#),

Jewish Rabbis like K'ab al-Ahbar, Wahab bin Minbah and 'Abd Allah bin Salam, who pretended to be Muslim, caused irreconcilable damage to Islam. They were either companions (*sahabah*) or companions of the companions (*tabi'in*). They invented superstitious traditions and spread them between the Muslims. They wrote commentaries on the Qur'an and related traditions from the viewpoint of Judaism.[12](#)

For centuries, the results of the evil actions of these imposters were accepted as truth by the Muslims.

Samarah bin Jundab, who is considered a companion of the Prophet, was Mu'awiyah's publicist. He falsified the occasion and reason of revelation for two verses of the Qur'an for the price of 1,400 dirhams. He said that the verse which was revealed about 'Ali (a) when he slept in the Prophet's bed on the night of the migration[13](#) was actually about 'Abd al-Rahman bin Muljam, who murdered 'Ali (a). He also said that a verse concerning the hypocrites[14](#) was about 'Ali (a).

He said these incredible lies in front of thousands of Syrian Muslims who did not know 'Ali's (a) position vis-à-vis the Prophet or Allah. He enticed them to spill 'Ali's blood (a) and his follower and the blood of his followers.

The war between the Syrians and 'Ali (a) took place as a result of the actions of these hypocrites. The war ended deceitfully after Syria lost 125,000 soldiers. Moreover, 65,000 members of 'Ali's (a) army were martyred.

It is here that one must recall one of the Commander of the Faithful's important sayings about hypocrites. He said the following about the group of hypocrites who pretended to be companions of the Prophet and attributed many lies to him for their own benefit: "People would never believe them if they knew that they were hypocrites and liars. But people have been deceived about their companionship with the Prophet. They tell themselves that these people saw the Prophet, heard and accepted truths from him and that they never say anything in opposition to the truth, while in fact they, the Muslims, do not know the condition of these people."¹⁵

Abu Hurayrah was present for three years during the time of the Prophet. He made up many strange traditions and attributed them to the Prophet. This angered 'Umar immensely. 'Umar whipped him and said: "You do not have the right to relate traditions from the Prophet. If you do, I shall exile you to the land of your ancestors."

One day, in the presence of 'Ali (a), Abu Hurayrah's name came up. 'Ali (a) said: "He attributed the most lies to the Prophet."¹⁶

There are just some examples of the irreconcilable damage that was caused by the hypocrites at the beginning of Islam. If we look at the damage that the rest of the hypocrites caused to our noble religion, we would see the truth behind Allah's words: "They are the enemies." We would always supplicate to Allah to rid our society of their evil.

¹. 63:4

². Tabarasi, Majmu' al-Bayan, volume 10, under the commentary of Surah Munafiqun

³. Ruh al-Bayan, under the explanation of the same verse

⁴. Shaykh Mufid, Irshad, page 61; 'Allamah Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, volume 20, page 368

⁵. Ibn Kathir, al-Kamil, volume 2, page 138; 'Allamah Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, volume 20, page 353

⁶. Ibn Kathir, al-Kamil, volume 3, page 162

⁷. Halabi, Sirah, volume 3, page 24

⁸. 'Allamah Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, volume 20, page 353

⁹. Shaykh Tabarasi, Majmu' al-Bayan, volume 9, page 117

¹⁰. Halabi, Sirah, volume 3, pages 25-26

¹¹. This is the age of the first three caliphs, namely Abu Bakr, 'Umar and 'Uthman. During this time, Islam spread to far away lands and, because of the dominance of the Islamic society and culture, all opposition parties were forced to swallow their hatred.

¹². Ibn Khaldun, Muqadamah, page 416

¹³. 2:207

¹⁴. 2:204

¹⁵. Imam 'Ali (a), Nahj al-Balaghah, sermon 205

¹⁶. Sharef al-Din 'Amuli, Abu Hurayrah, page 27 (Arabic version)

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